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## **GEORGIAN ORNITHONYMS, WITH ARMENIAN AND CAUCASIAN PARALLELS**

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This paper takes a look at a score of bird names in Georgian, not so much because they are interesting lexical items, which reveal much about the language, its speakers', and their culture's attitude to the world around them, but because bird-names, like the names of trees and wild animals, have especially interesting implications when we are looking at the genetic and areal relationship of a language. With ornithonyms, however, we must be very cautious, for their identification and their history are fraught with many difficulties. Bird names differ in one respect from other basic lexical elements in a language. Most speakers can identify with assurance and accuracy a high percentage of, say, one hundred names of parts of their body, or of their household implements. There is a wide consensus, too, over the names of static or inanimate

objects. Names of trees, even though unknown to many town dwellers, show a stable pattern: while there are changes of designation, from beech to oak or from willow to yew, these are fairly infrequent. Birds, however, are a different matter. For one thing the number of birds whose names figure in the vocabulary of an average speaker may be only a tiny percentage of the hundreds of species for which the language has devised a name. Moreover, names switch promiscuously from species to species, on the basis of call or colour, quite irrespective of an ornithologist's taxonomy. For this reason, we will confine ourselves to birds that have an established function in the language and in its culture: such birds symbolise moral qualities or defects (eagle, hawk, crow, magpie, dove, vulture); they have heraldic or poetic significance (eagle, owl, lark, stork); they are used by the aristocracy for hunting (eagle, hawk, falcon); they are kept as song birds (thrush, chaffinch, starling, warbler); they compete with man for food (hawk, kite, magpie, heron, rook); they invade man's habitations (martins, sparrows, pigeons, crows, jackdaws, thrushes), or they mark the coming of spring and of autumn (cranes, swallows).

The names of birds which have such functions, practical or symbolic, in human life, tend to be stable and consensual. They also, however, show an interesting division in any language which has been substantially affected by the speech of an invading conqueror. Birds used by the aristocrat for hunting or reserved for their tables are often named in the language of the conqueror, whether this has become the language of the territory or not, while birds unfit for aristocratic use keep the name used by the conquered people. English provides one type of example: the Anglo Saxon terms for eagle and falcon were replaced by Norman French words from the 12th century. Hungarian provides another type of example: words for lowly species (e. g. *veréb*, sparrow, *galamb*, pigeon) have remained Slavonic to this day.

For this reason a small group of Georgian bird names offer food for thought: a number are strikingly Indo-European in their form — Klimov names two, *c'ero* [წერო], crane, and *orbi* [ორბი] eagle, now griffon vulture, and there are half a dozen others which bear at least

preliminary investigation. As with tree names and names of wild animals, we are faced with the fact the 'nobler' species seem to bear names with Indo-European implications, while 'humbler' species, more often than not, show non-Indo-European, and occasionally North West or North East Caucasian affiliations. Before your scepticism or enthusiasm is too much aroused, let me say that the initial impression of Indo-European connections that the bird-names give us is frequently not borne out by closer investigation. Nevertheless it deserves following up.

Before we proceed further, we must make a very important reservation. Unlike trees and unlike most mammals, birds themselves, rather than human beings, create their own appellations. For example, the names for corvids will often have a velar and an *r*; owls usually show a labial and an *u*, while finches show a labial fricative and a *č*, so that the similarities between Georgian and Indo-European (whether Greek, Armenian, or some unspecified early Indo-European dialect in Anatolia) in this case are perhaps little more significant than those between, say, Australian languages and Turkic. Thus a number of conjectural etymologies may have to be dismissed, or at least qualified.

The other major difficulty for investigating ornithonyms is that we have no extant illustrated ancient Hebrew bird-watchers' guide. Many ornithological terms in old Georgian are derived from translation of the Bible, from Greek and through Greek from Hebrew. It is not the fault of the translators that one, say, may render Job as a 'brother to dragons and a companion to owls' and another as a 'companion to ostriches', when the Hebrew term *bath yaanah* means 'daughter of howling.' If the context is ambiguous we can rarely be sure of the species. Even the specifications in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as to what birds are *kosher* and which are not, leave questions of identification uncertain. Many ornithonyms are in any case arbitrary: the use of Georgian *siri* [სირი], small bird, to translate Heb. *tsippor* [צפור] or Gk. *strouthion* [στρουθίον] does not necessarily prove that this is the word for sparrow. The material from Georgian Bible translations should therefore be treated with respectful suspicion.

Once we have uttered these caveats, we may begin with the

noblest bird and best-known Indo-European ornithonym in Georgian. Give or take a century, at the same time that the Normans brought *aigle* to England and the Hungarians brought *sas* to Pannonia, the Armenian *arciw* [արծիւ] displaced the native Georgian *orbi* [ორბი], and probably for similar reasons. The heraldic emblem of the Bagration royal dynasty gave its name to the real bird. Probably a similar process took place in the Basque country five centuries earlier; the Indo-European *arrano*, eagle, is almost certainly one of the aggressive terms, like *ganibeta*, knife, left in Basque by Visigoth rule. Georgian Bible translations from Gelati (13th century) onward prefer *arc'ivi* to *orbi*; a shift took place and in literary Georgian *orbi* came to denote the griffon vulture.

Like Armeno-Georgian *arc'ivi*, however, *orbi* appears to have Indo-European affiliations, for Gk. ὄρνις or Gothic *ara*. The argument is complicated, however, only by the fact that this root seems, like a number of other cultural terms, to have penetrated into North East Caucasian, at least the Nakh languages. We might not be surprised that Batsbi, being dominated by Georgian cultural terms, should also have Armenian *arc'iv*, but Ingush *ärzi* [әрзи] and Chechen *ärzo* [әрзо] surprise one with their apparent cognacy with Indo-European, in contrast to more typical Daghestani forms, such as Bazhta *cu*: or Tabasaran *lūq'*.

The 'eagle', however, is not the only bird whose denomination has been altered by a conquering culture. Other birds used for falconry show the same pattern: the Georgian for merlin, *gavazi* [გავაზი], appears from at least the 13th century, presumably through Persian from the same ultimate Arabic source as Spanish *gavilan* or Basque *gabirai*.

Other birds are linked with the aristocracy's pursuits, with the pursuit of love rather than game e.g., nightingales. The words for 'nightingale' in Georgian show a double shift. Today's word, *bulbuli* [ბულბული], Arm. *bulbul* [բուլբուլ] comes from Arabic via Persian culture and is not found before the late twelfth century. Before that (for instance in the Georgian translation of the Persian Visramiani) we find *aidoni* [აიდონი] which is unmistakably from Greek *aedo:n* [ἀηδών]. This process mirrors Georgia's shift from Byzantine to Persian orbit. Before *iadoni*, however, there must have been another word. The

Georgian warbler, *asp'uč'ak'a* [ასპუჭაკა], a very similar species, was very likely used for nightingale too. In Abkhaz the two species have related terms, *aq'armac'es*, nightingale; *aq'armeš* warbler; the fact that we have no written Georgian texts before Greek influence was entrenched prevents us from reconstructing more than tentatively the non-Indo-European Georgian term that has been supplanted.

Greek bird names are more or less transparently reflected in other Georgian words. As in Armenian, so in Georgian, for reasons that are obscure, but presumably connected with the mythology of the halcyon, the Greek [ἄλκυων], kingfisher, replaced whatever native term may have existed, so that we have Armenian *alkion* [ալկიონ] and Georgian *alk'uni* [ალკუნი]. The Georgian for pigeon, dove *t'redi* [ტრედრი] (now *mt'redi* [მტრედრი]) has a distinctly un-Kartvelian shape to it; it is just conceivable that it derives from the Greek bird name *peristera* [περιστέρα], which it regularly translates in Biblical texts. The word for turtledove, *gvrit'i* [გვრიტი], also echoes the terms in Indo-European, e.g. Russian [гоплица], Greek [τρουγών], and Turkic, e.g., Osmanli *kumru*, *güvercin*, but that is probably for entirely different, onomatopoeic reasons.

One popular songbird, the chaffinch, has in Georgian an un-Kartvelian name, *sk'vinča* [სკვინჩა], whose initial Indo-European consonant cluster suggests not just the usual imitation of the bird's chatter (which is implied by the Latin *fringilla*, and the verb *fringultio*, I stutter babble). The fact that the same form has been imported into Abkhaz, *ak'uinča* [акуинча], suggests that the bird, as a traded commodity, a popular cage bird, acquired an supranational term.

Two culturally important birds are the lark and the swallow: they symbolise the coming of summer, aspiration to the heavens, communication with the dead. In both cases the Georgian terms *t'orola* [ტოროლა] and *mercxali* [მერცხალი] have no obvious Kartvelian, Caucasian or Indo-European etymologies. Derivation from a Greek or Pelasgian form is not excluded, for in both cases the names of lark and swallow show two or three consonants in common with Greek, *korudalos* [κορυδαλός] and *xelidon* [χελιδόν], although the Armenian for lark,

*artoyt* [արտոյտ], also appears to be not unrelated. In the case of the swift, however, the influence of Indo-European is unmistakable. The Greek [δρεπανις] reminds us of the sickle form of the bird's silhouette, and the Armenian is a calque, *manglat'ew* [մանգալաթէւ] which results in the Georgian *namgala* [ნამგალა] (from *namgali* [ნამგალი] sickle).

The second ornithonym cited by Klimov (1994) as an Indo-Europeanism in Georgian is *c'ero* [წერო] crane. At first sight its similarity to the universal Indo-European \**ger-* root that we see in Latin *grus*, Greek [γερανός], Armenian *krunk* [կռոմկ], Russian [журавль], etc. As with the root for 'eagle', however, we find it in North West Caucasian too, for instance Adyge *q'erew* [к'эреу], which makes it hard to account for as evidence for an Indo-European-Kartvelian Sprachbund. North East Caucasian gives us reduplicative examples, notably the example of Ingush *γarayula* [rlaparlypa], while in Daghestan we have a number of similar terms (e.g., reflected in Bezhta *q'unq'ra*), like the Armenian *krunk* [կռոմկ], from which the most attractive deduction is that all these terms for 'crane' have converged because they reflect the bird's own call, of which a velar and an *r* are a satisfactory rendition. To what extent the terms have arisen spontaneously or migrated from language to language is impossible to determine. The crane thus joins the corvids and the owls as a species that has dictated its appellation to human beings of every linguistic grouping.

Sparrows too appear to have left in unrelated language groups a similar name, whose consonant structure consists of labial and an *r*, sometimes preceded by a sibilant. Hebrew has *tsippor* [צִפּוֹר], Arabic has 'aṣfur [اصفور], Russian *vorobei* [воробей], which in this respect follow the Georgian term [*beyura*] [ბელურა]. The word *beyura*, however, is not attested in early Georgian texts, and both Hebrew *tsippor* and Greek *strouthion* are rendered *siri* [სირი], small bird, in Biblical translations. Whether Georgian *beyura* [ბელურა] is an infantile word (like many Georgian nouns for birds and mammals beginning with *b-*), or whether it is an indigenous Caucasian term, I cannot say. Abkhaz [*abayar*] may be a borrowing from Georgian rather than a North West Caucasian term, despite the apparent presence of the native root [*bay*] (North East

Caucasian has very different terms for sparrow, e.g., Budukh *čilič*).

Just as shifts have taken place into Georgian from a source that is Indo-European (whether a historically attested Greek, Armenian or Persian, or the conjectural prehistoric Indo-European language that we assume to have had some areal connection with proto-Kartvelian), so shifts have taken place into Abkhaz from Georgian. We have noted *ak'uinča* and possibly [*abayər*]. Another popular cage bird, the starling, in Georgian *šrošani* [შროშანი] or *šošia* [შოშია], has given Abkhaz *aš'oš'a* [аш'ош'а]. In Georgian the aristocratic peregrine falcon, *ševardeni* [შევარდენი], has ousted the North West Caucasian *-bay* root for predators and given Abkhaz *aš'awardən* [аш'аардын], a completely opaque term which has lost the transparency of the participle form in Georgian (=swooping down). Despite superficial appearances, *ševardeni* is a native Georgian derivation, not a calque of Latin *accipiter*, <\**acupeter*, not <\**ad-cipiens*. The older Georgian term for eagle, *orbi*, almost certainly gives the first half of the composite Abkhaz term for eagle, *awarbay*.

However, other Abkhaz-Georgian parallels, such as magpie, *k'ač'k'ači* [კაჭკაჭი] and *ak'ač'k'ač'* [აკაჩკაჩ], may merely demonstrate the wide consensus throughout the Caucasus and Asia for the designation of corvids, with voiceless ejective velars and fricatives (cf. also Turkish *karga*). Falconidae also show names of a phonological make-up in various Caucasian languages, e.g., Georgian *k'irk'it'a* [კირკიტა] onomatopœic names, pheasants, partridges, pigeons, the latter, for instance Ingush *kxokx* [кхокх], Abkhaz *ah<sup>w</sup>əh<sup>w</sup>*. As in mythology, so in linguistics, the eagle stands out in the bird world as the only term widespread over Caucasian and Indo-European languages that we can with any certainty say is not an approximation to a bird call and not merely a borrowed term. And its Armenian correspondent *arciw* [արծիւ] is in accord.

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# Some bird terms for comparison and contrast

ENGLISH	GEORGIAN	ABKHAZ	ADYGE	INGUSH	N.E. CAUC.
eagle	არწივი, ორბი	აуарбагъ	бгъэжъ	аьрзо	cu: <i>Bezhta</i>
falcon	შევარღენი	ашъауардын	бгъэ	лаьча	lač'in <i>Dargwa</i>
hawk	ქორი, მიმინო	ахьшъ	бгъашхьо	кер	
owl	ბუ	аты	тыгъурыгъу	бoв	
crane	წერო	ачома	къереу	гIаpагIуpа	q'unq'ra <i>Bezhta</i>
swift	ნამგალა	апъкаат			
swallow	მერცხალი	ажэтыс	пцIашхъу	чIаpаг	
lark	ტოროლა	ауарғанцъ	(бзыу)хъакуаку	чкъорд	
sparrow	ბელურა	абагъыр	пхъэшхъэкIэ	хъазилг	čilit' <i>Budukh</i>
starling	შრომანი, შოშია	ашьошья		алкхашк	
magpie	კატკატი	акачкач	къандж	къижакъайг	q:araq:al <i>Rutul</i>
jay	ჩხიკვი	ахъажъ			
raven	ყორანი	акуараан	цунды	хъаргIа	
dove	(მ)ტრელი	ахъыхъ	тхъаркьо	кхокх	lirx'oay <i>Rutul</i>
turtledove	გურიტი	акуараса			
nightingale	იადონი ბუღბუღი				
		акарматъыс	новцолг		
chaffinch	სკეინზა	акуинча			

## Some bird terms for comparison and contrast

ENGLISH	GREEK	LATIN	RUSSIAN	ARMENIAN
<i>(old and new)</i>				
eagle	ἄετός	aquila	орёл	արծիւ
falcon	ἰέραξ	buteo	сокол	բազէ
hawk	ἰέραξ	accipiter	ястреб	շահէն
owl	γλαυξ	bubo	сова	բու
crane	γέρανος	grus	журавль	կռուկ
swift	δρέπανις	apus	стриж	մանգրաթեւ
swallow	χελιδών	hirundo	ласточка	ծիծեռնակ
lark	κορυδαλός	alauda	жаворонок	արտույտ
sparrow	στρουθιον	passer	воробей	ճնճղուկ
starling	ψαρώνι	sturnus	скворец	սարլակ
magpie	κίσσα	pica	сорока	կաշաղ
jay	κίσσα	garrulus	сойка	անծեղ
raven	κόραξ	corvus	ворон	ազուաւ
dove	περιστερά	columba	голубь	հաւփալ
turtledove	τρογών	turtur	горлица	տաւրակ
nightingale	ἄηδών	luscinia	соловей	սոխակ
chaffinch	σπίνος	fringilla	зяблик	սարեկիկ